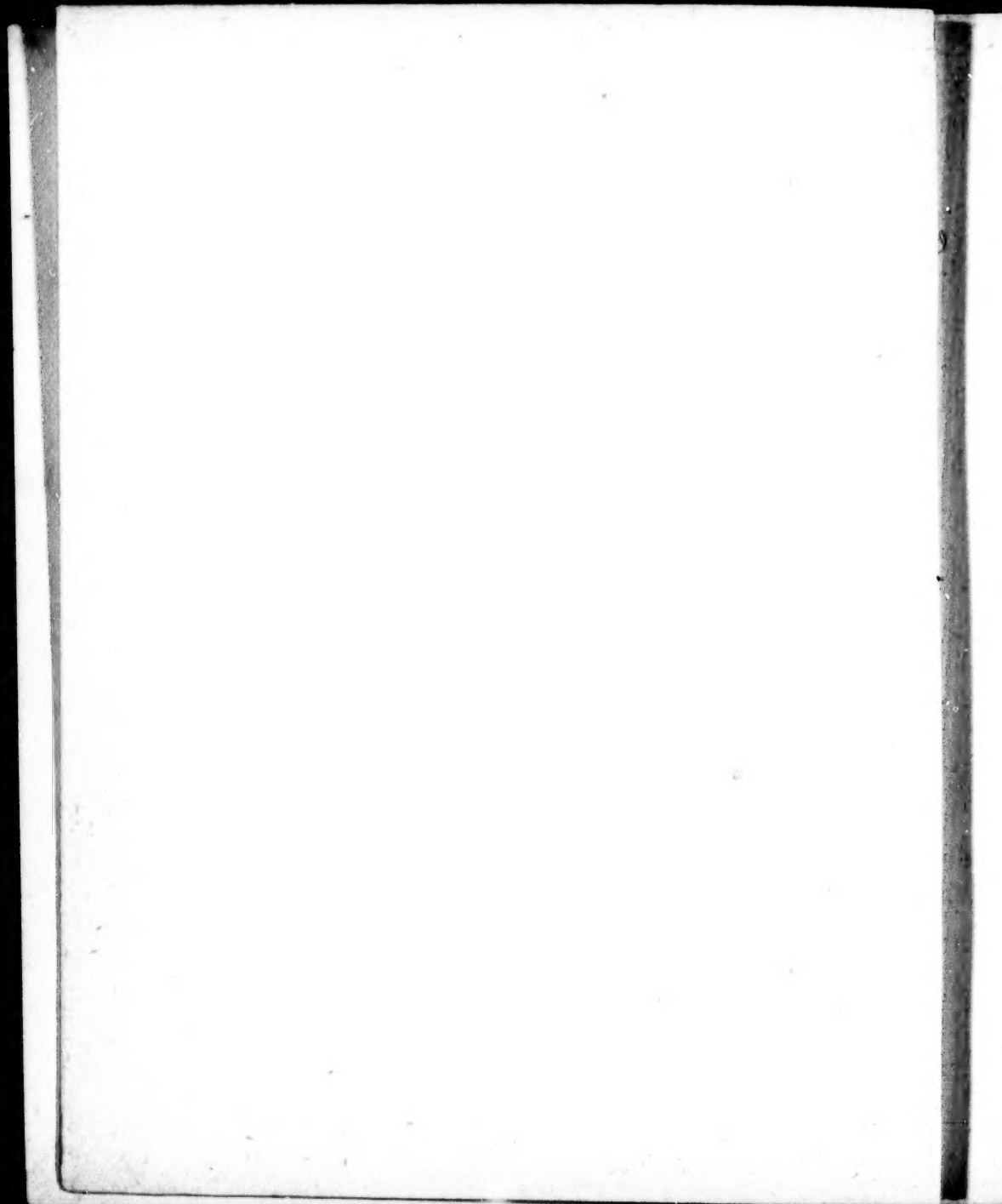


PR9

J471

CANADIANA

FLOWERING THORNS.



FLOWERING THORNS.

BY

GERTRUDE JERDON,

AUTHOR OF "KEYHOLE COUNTRY," ETC.

" We women have four seasons like the year ;
Some miss one season—some another ; this
Shall have them early, and that late ; but yet
The year wears round with all as best it may."

PHILIP BAILEY.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXXXVI.

11,254

FLOWERING THORNS.



I, Lilian Harwood—Lilian Gresham once—
In turning over reverently the store
Of papers in a certain much-used desk,
Left to me by the will of one I loved
With daughter love who knew no mother care—
Found this, this poem, hidden 'neath a pile
Of business notes and parish documents,
Accounts of soup and medicine for the poor,
As if the writer merely deemed it worth
A reference now and then when time had raised
A mist about the days of long ago.
But I who read it now, 'mid blinding tears,
Remembering well the day of which it speaks,
Resolve to let it live a wider life,
And be perhaps to some unthinking mind
Some part of what that day has been to me.

THE spring had come, and every lilac bud
Was opening to the early breath of May ;
Laburnums flashed amid the evergreens

Or pale spring foliage, and beneath my feet
Was spread a wilderness of early flowers.
I sauntered slow along the leafy lane
Which skirted here the bounds of Wood-
leigh Park,
When, through the murmuring silence
struck a voice.

“Do spend this evening with us, Lilian”

(Such

The broken colloquy in tones unknown),

“For you can waste your time on any day
With these absurd old maids. Such stupid
things

Are best left to themselves. Do come with
us.”

“No, Lucy,” said a voice I recognised
As Lilian Gresham’s. “Do not tempt me,
dear ;

My word is pledged to meet my kind old
friends

At Willow Cottage." Then the two passed
on.

I scarce had heard so much but that the paths
Ran by each other here a while. I smiled,
For I was one of these same "kind old
friends"

Whom Lilian was to meet at five o'clock—
An early hour, but we were all old maids.
Six friends, and six old maids, a sisterhood
That helped the Vicar with his parish work,
Held Mothers' Meetings, taught in Sunday-
School,

And undertook a hundred other things
Too often left alone for us. We had
Our friends amid both rich and poor, and oft
Would wile away the time with pleasant chat

Of their affairs, which converse had one aim,
That we, by interchange of thought and
 scheme,
Might learn how best to aid or comfort those
In want, or grief, or need of sympathy.

And each of us was full of tender love
For Lilian Gresham, daughter of the squire
At Woodleigh Manor. She that love re-
 turned
In full to all our quiet sisterhood.
Two were her aunts, her father's sisters ; one
Of some far distant kin ; the other two
Had known her since her baby years ; while I,
I was her mother's dearest, earliest friend.

And often when the summer days were
 long

Would Lilian bring her work into our midst
To hear our parish talk, and give us news
Which she had gathered in her morning calls ;
Or in the winter evenings, long and dark,
She sat with us around a glowing fire
And read or sang to us. Oh she was fair,
And sweet, and lovable, and I was loth
That she should learn to treat us with the
scorn

With which, alas ! the world so often treats
The poor old maid ; and I resolved to-night
To let her hear the stories of our lives,
That she might keep a tender heart for age
Unblest by all that woman holds most dear,
Like some bare thorn when summer leaves
are dead,
Unwreathed with husband's or with chil-
dren's love

(And so, perhaps, too often thorny sharp),
A slowly withering autumn time of life,
With all the glory missing from the days.

The Sisters Gresham lived at Woodleigh
Lodge,
A rambling gabled building ; ever green
With ivy, and in autumn all aglow
With crimson creepers. It was set in turf
Of velvet softness, gemmed with beds of
flowers.
The gravelled drive was flanked by rows of
limes,
Whose branches flung their shade beyond
the wall
That barred from vulgar or intrusive gaze
The sacred haunts of aristocracy.
It was a lovely and a peaceful home,

Well fitted for the sisters of the squire.
And not far off, where the long village street
Broke from the country, where each house
 made two,
And fronted tiny lawns with garden gates,
Stood Willow Cottage (halved with Maple
 Lodge) ;
And here lived Ursula, who seldom crossed
Its little threshold, but for weeks would lie
A patient sufferer on a couch of pain,
And watch the sun set over Woodleigh
 Church,
Or spring's green touch upon the forest trees
Across the road. And lower down again,
Just where the village heart beat fastest, o'er
An unpretentious shop, had Grace two rooms,
Because the rent was low, and Grace was
 poor.

And near a mile from this there stood a
house,
A large grey mansion with an iron gate,
O'er which there hung an eye-attracting
board
To tell the traveller that it was a home
For servant girls, where each was taught
her work,
And kept when ill, or homeless. At the
head
Was Agnes.

In a house which faced the church
(One meadow only rolled its breadth be-
tween)
Had I my lodgings, three bright spacious
rooms
Which overlooked a garden sweet with rose

And jessamine, sweet-williams, pinks, and
all

Old-fashioned flowers ; and in two other
rooms

The Curate dwelt ; an active, simple man,
Who brought his sermons to me when the
house

Was closed, and read them—I must act his
aunt

When ladies came to tea ; and in my ear
He poured his tales of fancies, for the youth
Had never been in love. I liked him well,
And I was fifty, he was twenty-four.

Now tea was over, and we clustered round
The latticed cottage window, for the month
Was May, and still the sun peeped o'er the
trees,

And only thought of all his crimson robes
Of parting. Through the open casement
came

The heavy scent of lilac and of may,
While now and then a pearly petal fell
Upon the sill, or on our busy hands.
A faint far fragrance, as of burning herbs
From distant garden, filled the evening air,
Which often trembled to the melody
Of Woodleigh village bells, for fitfully
The men were practising the chime to-night

We sat in silence, for the hour was one
To nourish musing. Low upon the floor
Sat Lilian, all her golden tresses loose
And falling to the kitten on her knee,
Whose gentle purring to her fondling hand
Lent rest to meditation. Long we sat
Without a word, and then I spoke :

“ My dear,”

I said to Lilian, “have you ever thought
How many lives which meet us in this small
Green corner of the world’s wide stage
have parts

Assigned them now, by the Great Manager,
Which once they little deemed would fall
to them ?

Each actor has a place in many plays,
And few may choose their place. From
tragedy

To comedy they move ; we cannot trace
One touch of Hamlet in the cruel tones
Of Shylock, or in Portia’s stately mien
Discern the weak Ophelia crowned with
flowers.

So in ‘Earth’s Theatre ;’ we do not
guess

At past romance, or joy, or agony,
From parts which only serve to throw the
 whole
Up brightly to applause. There is one part
Which none would choose, and yet which
 some must play,
Or life's great drama would be incomplete.
That part to be 'old maid;' and oh ! how oft
From some sweet dream or fearful tragedy
The sudden summons wakens : 'Rise and
 act,
The Master Mind which fixed thy part at
 first
Has chosen this for thee.' And as we move
In silence through the uneventful scenes
Which stretch far onward to the bound of
 life,
How few there are to wonder if our past

Was bright for us, or how we came to fill
Our quiet place ! You, child, have never
heard

The reason of my present lonely life :
Say, shall I tell you now ?

Long years ago,
Some thirty years perhaps, when I was
young,
And gloried in my youth, and felt my grasp
Upon the world was close, the lovely world
That never yet had crossed my slightest will ;
On life's bright morning suddenly there
flashed

A soul more perfect than my fondest dreams
Had pictured, the ideal of my thoughts
Made grandly manifest. A man whose life
Retained no fold, a pure, transparent life,

With deeds, and thoughts, and feelings all
confessed,

And set to highest strains that filled his
world

With music. He was one whose lot on
earth

Was aye to elevate, and draw all souls
That touched him upwards to the grand
ideal

Of love and service, by his blameless life.
This light broke through my days, and I
was mute,

And every former love and lesser joy
Sank low beneath one flood of ecstasy,
As once the Deluge buried out of sight
Each hill-girt lake and stream. So lay my
heart,

An ocean boundless, fathomless, beneath

The sunshine of his presence. Well—
enough,

We met, and meeting loved. Then all the
days

For many glorious weeks were full of song.

We lost no moments in vain doubts or fears.

We loved so fully, there was left no room

For jealousy ; and then at last the day

Was fixed to make us one for evermore.

How shall I tell the rest? But yet there
stood

One comfort out amid the gloom, for God

Forebore to use the dread machinery

Of human hands or ills to execute

The fatal sentence ; so we could not lay

His death to chance or man. 'Twas God
who held

The fearful lightning in His own right Hand

Which was His sudden flashing messenger
To call my darling home. No parting word
Was mine, I might not look upon his face
Nor touch his hand, and all the world grew
dark.

They err who tell us sorrow grows with age,
And grief weighs heaviest when all the spring
And elasticity of youth is past.
Such loads seem light when short and few
the years
To be so burdened. To the young, alas !
Who see a long blank future stretch away
Far out of reach, the weight appears to be
Intolerable. Of the dreary years
Which followed this I cannot speak. God
knew,
And only God, my sufferings.

Thus it is
That I am proud to bear the name 'old
maid.'

Yes, I am old ; it is some comfort now,
For every year takes from my pain some
sting,

And helps to bridge the chasm of my life
To an eternal future. It is good
To reckon backwards all the weary years,
And watch heaven's glory slowly break
across

My few remaining days. And I am still
A maid, true to the soul that halved my own,
The soul that I shall surely, surely claim
As mine in Paradise. Perhaps you ask,
Might I have wedded since? Oh yes,
indeed,

There came to me a man of wealth and mind,

Who truly loved me, only asked my hand,
Content to wait for love, if love would
come ;

If not, he was content to love alone.
But this I could not do, I could not set
Another in *his* place, and so forego
The right to meet him as my own in heaven.
Thus do I sit beside a lonely hearth
A true old maid, whose heart could only
hold

One love, yet that one love so great
That it sufficed to fill her life and gild
The portals of the grave."

I ceased, and through
The room there reigned a silence. Lilian
stole

Her hand in mine in tender sympathy ;
And by-and-by spoke Mona Gresham. She

The eldest of the six. Her raven hair
Was whitened by the silv'ry touch of time,
And in her eyes the fire of early days
Was softened, not extinguished by a love
Which came to her with grief.

“Your tale is sad,”
She said, “yet not so sad as mine ; for you
The torch of love was lifted up so high
By mutual hands, that on the twilight years
Its light still lingers. ‘Memory’s golden
chain,’
Kept bright by faith and love, still links
your life
To his. It was far otherwise with me.

Ere I had tasted all the doubtful joys
Of freedom from restraint, when scarce
eighteen,

There came one autumn time to Woodleigh
Mill

An artist, there to lodge, and catch the
tints

Of bright October on our forest trees,
And for a season rest his eyes and brain
With happy country indolence. 'Twas
mine

To point him out the fairest glades and
scenes

Most worthy to be made immortal; I
It was who listened to his artist talk—
Brief glances at a world beyond my world
It gave me. Oh my soul was very young,
And it had formed no image of the man
That it could worship. So it came, he
made

At once my great ideal, and my love.

Four autumns passed, and every autumn
found

My Wilfred at the Mill ; and still I hid
My secret from all eyes. There was no time
In those brief weeks for thought, and thought
it is

Which brings the blush or shakes the steady
voice.

There were long dreary months to feast my
heart

Upon October's golden memories,
And then his name had slipped from common
talk.

For him I learned to do a hundred things ;
I learned to draw and paint, that he might
touch

The canvas with a critic's brush. For him
I learned to sing the quaint old Irish airs,

That he was ever humming o'er his work ;
I read the books he liked, that we the more
Might understand each other, and my time
Had all some thought of him. Alas ! alas !
He never loved me.

Came at last a day
When Woodleigh Mill stood empty, and we
heard
That this October,—still his month of rest,—
Was dedicated to a wedding tour.

Yes, he was married, and my heart grew
cold,
And bitter with its pain ; yet no one
guessed
My life was withered, when my laugh rang
clear
cross the lawn. My will was very strong,

And I resolved to stamp his image out
From everything which bore it. But my
love

Had burned it in, and I could only throw
A veil o'er all my sacred things, all high
Aspirings, tender feelings, and the love
Of beauty, nobleness, and piety,
For each retained the impress of the mind
That I must now forget. Oh, fond conceit !
Could I forget myself?

Three times my hand
Was sought in marriage, and three times
did he,—

Nay, it was God through him Who warned
me off,—

Thrice did his image bar the path to all
We women prize so dearly. First I read

His name—a common name at most—amid
The news of daily deaths, and to my face
The crimson tide rushed wildly, then
returned,

And I awoke upon the floor, alone—
Yes, quite alone; and so I read the news
Again, and found it was not truly he,
Perhaps some uncle, who was seventy-six.
My Wilfred lived, but I was saved that
day

From perjury—a marriage oath is such
When lip and heart are severed.

Years passed on,
And still I tried to crush the lonely love
To that grey evenness of self-respect
And 'proper feeling' which, 'tis thought,
should keep

The maiden foot from scaling any height
Of unrequited love. But I, alas !
Could be content with plains no more, and
when

My urgent wishes told me that my heart
Was empty of the old, and all prepared
To bid the new love welcome, then I
dreamed.

And in my dream the wedding-day was
past,

And I was married to Sir David Moore.

The honeymoon had scarcely sped two weeks
When Wilfred met us, on the mountain
shores

Of sweet Lake Lemman. He was dressed in
black.

His wife was dead. His voice, his look, his
words

Were reproduced with that exactitude
We scarcely catch awake, and I was bound,
And could not stir to greet him. Well it
was

The scream with which I tore myself from
sleep

Passed all unheard by others in the house.
I must be free, I felt. How could I wed
Sir David Moore, and dread another man's
Low voice, or smile, or very presence?

So

The years went slowly on, eight weary years
And once again my feet were at the door
Of marriage. Time had laid a healing hand
Upon my wound, and somewhat dulled the
sense

Of loss and need; and so I faced a change

With wavering purpose, one long autumn
day,
As I was wandering through the Woodleigh
lanes.

But Wilfred stopped me! 'Neath the
spreading elm
Beside the tinkling brook I met him, come
For one brief day, to show an artist friend
The scenes immortalised by painters' skill,
Whose place was now beyond the reach of
blame.

We met; a few short words were inter-
changed,
The shadow of the past was raised, and then
Flung back to its oblivion with a jest,
Half sad, half merry. What was it to him?
We asked for common friends, if all were
well,

And then our fingers clasped, and he was
gone,
Gone humming down the lane a favourite
air,
While I stood white and still, not quite my-
self,
And yet too much myself; and round my
head
The brown leaves fluttered to a sudden
breeze,
Which bore his echoing footsteps to my ears.
I was alone for evermore, I knew
From that dread hour my fate was sealed
for life."

So Mona ceased, and all the room grew
hushed ;
E'en Lilian had no word to break the calm.

The girl had never crossed the path before
Of one whose love was lonely. Such, she
thought,
Were only formed to thrill a modern tale,
And this had grown beside her all her life !
No wonder she was silent ; but her awe,
The awe of novelty, was hardly felt
By Elice, Mona's sister, and at last
She spoke.

“ It is not wholly sad,” she said,
“ For life to yield to love its breadth and
length,
For even unrequited love will keep
A fragrance through a lifetime. She is not
Unblest who once has learned the heavenly
art
Of loving, for its echoes will not die.

With me, alas ! it was not so, for pride,
Not love, o'erruled my life ; and yet not
pride

Alone, but ignorance as well. I threw
My soul into my books from earliest years ;
My study and my pastime were combined
In one deep thirst for knowledge. Latin,
Greek,

Philosophy, the sciences, the arts,
Alike were grasped, with strong or feeble
touch,

As women touch such things. Yet had I
not

Begun to learn to spell my woman's heart ?
'Twas knowledge for itself that I pursued
With such quick eagerness ; not for the aid
That her keen edge might give me to undo
The knots and tangles of perplexity,

Which ever baffle minds to whom her page,
'Rich with the spoils of Time, is ne'er
unrolled.'

I did not seek her as some few seek wealth,
To spread a blessing on their fellow-men ;
But rather as the many, who for ends
Most selfish, gather riches. So my quest
Stopped ere the true end glorified the means.

As time went on I took an active part
In this world's hurried progress. Wrote a
book

Which sought to prove that women were as
strong

As men, and could do equal work, if once
Allowed to wrestle equally. I stood
A friend of women, standing up alone
To fight life's battle ; and I talked of love

As 'sentiment,'—a weak device of men
To keep us 'neath their tyrant sway,—at
best

Romantic gilding of a bygone age,—
The dream of idle women. So I toiled
To give my sisters work, and raise their
souls

Above the petty cares, and wants, and ends
Which mostly crowd their minds, and all
my days

Were full. I had no time to spare for
aught

But my great projects, for I surely deemed
Myself what Princess Ida also thought
Before her courts she fancied desecrate
By alien foot. Men fell away from me
And gazed afar, as we so often gaze
Afar at what we do not care to touch,

And yet admire. I think they too admired
The energy with which I strove to reach
My ends, and yet they dared not come too
near.

But I was satisfied, in my strong youth
And pride, the pride which must be ever
first,
And self-sufficient.

Years went on. At last
Across the smoothness of my life there stole
Some discontent, which broadened to a
need
Beyond the measure of my chosen days—
The need of love, the need of some strong
heart
To love me wholly, and that deeper want,
The need of loving some one wholly. Then

I sought in vain through all my schemes
and books

To find some aim to fill this bitter void,
This only seemed to lack. I faced the
world,

And found that it had registered no debt
Of love and happiness to me. In vain
I pleaded with my fate. One mocking cry
Was echoed to and fro from all around :
' Too late, too late, she scorned it once, and
now

The time is past.'

So I am here to-night
A woman who has never tasted love,
And so more worth deep pity."

Elice stopped.
Her face, the saddest face I ever saw,

Was stern with that dark shadow which a
past
Unwisely used can cast upon a face.

“But, Auntie, dearest, have you not your
niece,
Your Lilian, now to love you?” said the girl
In tender accents. She was scarce surprised
To hear this tale, for Elice had a way
Of looking grave when Lilian took her books,
And sighing : “Child, take care you do not
miss
The ends of woman’s life, as I have done.
Take care.”

She answered now, “I know it, dear,
I know you love me, Lilian ;” that was all.
Was that enough ?

Then from the lowly couch
A gentle, suffering voice broke through the
pause :

“ My life, like yours,” said Ursula, “ has
been
Unlighted and unscorched by love’s bright
flame,
And yet no torch of intellect was there
To strike across its commonplace a path
Of lesser brilliance. I had never time
To give to aught but trivial thoughts and plans
Which had importance only for ourselves.
We were eight sons and daughters, and
my place
Was first, the eldest of the family ;
And when my schooldays closed, I took the
post

Of teacher to my sisters, so their play
And leisure always came apart from me.
Thus I, who might have been their dearest
friend,
Stood for them as the thorny part of life,
The hours of toil, restraint, and weariness.

So time went on, till Rose and Nellie
burst
Their fetters, and 'came out.' But still
my place
Was with the others, and our Mother's
health
Grew feeble ; so I took the household cares
Upon me, while my sisters flew about
From flower to flower, which means from
ball to ball,
Or rural gathering, dinner party, *fête*,

And such like. 'They were young,' my
Mother said—

(But so was I)—'besides, society
Was healthful ; but amid her five, at least
One daughter might be found to stay at
home

And tend an ailing Mother.' That was true,
And so I always stayed. But by-and-by,
When schoolroom days were ended, still
my time

Was full, for I was ever called upon
To do the work, to give the others play.

Then there were those who came to woo
and win,
Who ever and anon would fill our house
With wedding festival ; and one by one
My sisters left us. No one came for me.

I had no moments I could throw away
On those first interchanges of idea—
Those tender nothings underneath the
moon—

The sweet low prelude to a sweeter tune.
Yet once I thought, — I fancied, — but
perhaps

'Twas only fancy, — that young Henry Milne
Would fain have known me better. He
could leave

The others when I joined them for a brief
Five minutes, offering me a chair, or song,
With 'Do, Miss Ursula, remain with us.'
I was much tempted, for I liked him well—
I only liked him, mind, I never loved.
Love needs a leisure which my busy days
Denied me ever, so at least I think.
But Rose or Nellie, from their pleasant talk,

Oft warned me of the paper to be read
To Father, or exclaimed the bell had rung
From Mother's couch. I think they might
have gone
Just now and then, and given me breathing-
space
To tune my heart to some sweet melody.
They never did, and so my life closed in ;
And Henry, disappointed, went away.

I do not think I grudged the hours I spent
In doing work that God had meant for five ;
Yet sometimes it was hard to see sweet
homes
And nurseries springing up around, to feel
That no one's heart was needing me to make
Its sunshine (and I could have loved so
well).

They never seemed to dream that I might
want

A home to call my own, and one to call
My dearest. So they left me in the shade
To do my duty.

When my Mother died,
I still had sickness to attend upon ;
For in our midst that fell disease which
plucks
The flowers, and leaves behind the bearded
grain,
Had taken root. Long months I watched
beside

Our Amy's dying bed ; and then our Rose
Returned from India with her child, to die.

So passed the years, till only three of us
Remained. Then all my former strength
gave way ;

I sank, from all the vigour of my youth,
To this low couch of pain and helplessness.

'Tis mine, you know, for ever."

So her tale
Concluded sadly. It seemed doubly sad
To me, for I had known the agony
And ecstasy of love. But though her words
Seemed bitter sometimes, on her marble
brow

No furrow of unrest remained, to tell
Of sacrifice enforced. The waves of life
Had raised no storm about her, but had
cast

Her solitary days as far beyond
The touch of love as if a tempest's rage
Had stranded her.

Lilian's eyes grew grave
And thoughtful with this homely tragedy
Unveiled before her so. Then Ursula
Turned from her own lot unto Grace and
said,

"And Grace, have you no tale of early days
To tell us?"

Grace made answer quietly :
"Such record as I have to give of life
Bears no impress of love, or intellect ;
Yet do I now accept my lonely lot
As from God's Hands, the lot of one too
weak
To bear the bliss of love, the weight of
thought,
The joy of usefulness. My life was all
Along the flats of earth, and every day

Repeated yesterday. For we were poor—
Too poor to mingle with our equals born
On whom was set the 'guinea stamp of
rank'

And wealth, and yet not low enough to
range

With village folk. So was our place
between.

And thus we got the good of neither, while
What was not good in both was ours. The
years

Sped on in loneliness, and yet were they
Not altogether sad, because our home
Was very sweet to us, albeit no home
Grew from it. From the first I surely felt
It was my only home. I could not dress
To please the eye, and I had never learned
The things to fit me for a rich man's wife.

I could not play, or paint, or speak a tongue
Besides my own, though I could bake and
sew.

But no one wanted that. The men I met
(And they were very few) could find no
charm

In me that drew them to me. So my life
Went round unchangingly, until at last
My parents died. My brother went away
To toil in foreign climes, and I was left
A simple lonely woman, an 'old maid,'
Not mourning broken hearts, or parted loves,
But just to live the remnant of my days
In quietude; the uneventful end
That well befits an uneventful life."

Grace told her tale as one too used to meet
The hard side of the world, to see how sad

It rose before the others. All the buds
Of life had opened for her 'neath a sky
So sunless, that she scarcely seemed to
think

There could be sun at all; and her pale
face

Had caught the grey reflection of her life.

But Lilian took scant interest in the tale,
It was too wholly cold and dim to fire
Her sympathy,—the sympathy of youth,
Which blazes up responsive to the touch
Of agony or rapture, still untried
By youth, so leaving space for wildest flights
Of young imagination to conceive
The glory and the pain.

So Lilian turned
To Agnes, whose deep thoughtful eyes
seemed scarce

To veil some secret, ever-present grief;
And looked, what she was half afraid to ask.
Then Agnes, reading right the mute appeal,
Turned to us, and in accents low and sad
Began :

“ Be thankful, O my friends, that
pain

Alone has fallen to you—not remorse.
And truly once I thought that our estate
Was holy from its isolation. God,
I thought, was chiefly honoured by a prompt
Renunciation of all earthly ties.
That virgin souls were precious in His sight
I found, or thought I found, in His true
Word.

So in the freshness of my youth I laid
The gift of all my life before Him. Oft
The vow of dedication I renewed

When kneeling at His altar rails, and oft
I planned my future in some sisterhood,
Where all the work was God's, and all the rest
Was contemplation of the things of God ;
And all my days should be entirely His,
No earthly care or joy to claim the hours.
And in the rapture of the great resolve,—
In the first glory of self-sacrifice—
It seemed a Heaven below.

But ere my fate
Was sealed for ever, to our parish came
One who was called to minister to us
In holy things, whose heart was glowing too
With zeal and love, and mine would some-
times catch
New fire from his, as his would catch from
mine.
Our thoughts were equal, and our daily paths

Oft led us to the same sad haunts of sin.
Or sorrow. In the same small church we
 knelt ;
His voice it was that told our wants, and
 sins,
And thanks to God ; and all the prayers to
 me
Seemed interwoven with his tones ; and yet
I never dreamed of love, except the love
That is half reverence we bear to those
Set o'er our souls.

 With him it was not so.
And one calm evening when we chanced to
 meet,
He told me that he loved me. Could I
 leave
The darling visions of my life to be
His helpmeet ?

I was stunned from all reply,
Nor spoke until the bell for Evensong
Rang out its summons. 'Afterwards,' I
said.

What could I say? It seemed a glorious
thing
To crown the life of one so good as he.
But, as he entered, robed, to lead our
prayers,
It flashed across me,—how I cannot tell,—
That I, too, loved him, as my very soul!

And God demands a sacrifice of self.
My life of single piety had turned
With sudden shudder to a cross; and who
Was I, then, to refuse to take it up?
Would God consent to share a throne?

O friends,
I dare not tell you all I thought of then!

I cannot tell you how the die was cast,
Nor how I smothered both our hopes in one
Gigantic ignorance of God's intents
For us. I did not know that human love
Is sent us to interpret the Divine
(So he that loves knows God, 'twas written
once)—

And thus we parted.

Since has passed no day
I have not rued my choice, for both our lives
Were spoilt. He for a while fought on,
Half-hearted, in the war of good with ill;
But blighted hopes had crushed his soul
from all

Its early aims. The promise never bloomed
Which we had nursed together in the bud.
He died. No more of that, his death lies
still

To my account. But what became of me ?
Think not that I have any more fulfilled
The dream for which I sold reality.

I could not offer unto God by life
Of virgin consecration to His will
A soul less spotless (so I wildly thought)
By this one taint of holy human love.
My vigour flagged, my zeal burnt low, and
now

I only live to do the work God meant
That we should do together."

Agnes rose

And stood beside the window, for her eyes
Were all too full of tears to meet a look
However kindly. Nature's evening smile
Was sweetest for her then, and Ursula,
With truest kindness left her to herself.

Her tale was one that few, perhaps, have
read

In common life, and yet it stirred to tears
The sympathies of Lilian. Love that soars
So high above itself, that it can lay
Its own best treasures as a sacrifice
Before some great ideal—false or true—
Will ever touch the depths of finer minds,
And such was Lilian's. But her gentle tears
Fell scarcely noticed. It is good for youth
To weep some tears over the sins and woes
Of others, so we sat in silence all.

The evening sky was deepening to the clear
Dark blue of night, and in the west was yet
The lingering radiance of a vanished sun.
The air was very calm, the bells had ceased,
And scarce a rustle stirred the hawthorn tree

Or shook the bent laburnum's golden tears ;
We, too, were silent, for our narratives
Had grown too surely from our hearts to
bear.

The "common air of speech." No human
hand
Could reach to those past years with healing
touch,
And no one had the right to soothe our
griefs
Or claim our confidence.

But still o'er all
The level of our lives there lies a soft
And mellow light, which at the close of day
May brighten to a glorious sunset, when
The purple clouds part to the shining feet
Of God's sweet angels. Then the lonely
hearts

Which never have been satisfied on earth—
That never have been rounded to the sphere
Of perfected existence here—shall find
The full accomplishment of every pain
Beneath a Father's smile.

If on the earth

We missed the blossoming of Summer-tide,
And Autumn stretched itself across the void
To wither up the leaf buds of the Spring,
Yet is there time and space in Heaven for
 hearts

To bloom beneath the sun of Perfect Love ;
Perhaps their beauty may be more complete,
Because so long suppressed ; and who can
know

The rest of satisfaction who has felt
No need of it?

But even on earth our lot

Is not unlovely, or unblest, for God
Makes flowering thorns. Though bare, and
sharp, and lone,
He wreathes some snowy blossoms round
our lives
Of usefulness or love. And—crowning
thought
For every quiet reverie—not ours
The choosing of our parts. The Master
Mind
Which guides the world has fixed them.
So we bow
Our souls in worship, saying, "Be it so,
If so it seemeth good to Thee, our God."

BENEATH the ivy-smothered elm that stands
Hoar watcher of the graves round Woodleigh
Church,

There rises from the daisy-sprinkled sod
A fresh mound, which has not yet clothed itself
In green, but draws the casual traveller's eye
By the white wreaths that shroud the unsightly earth
And tell of grief fresh even as their flowers.
Here was she laid a few short hours ago
Who wrote the words I now give to the world—
Words that have made my sorrow somewhat less,
Because that in my dreamings of her now
I do not see her as I saw her here,
Too obviously alone ; but though I know
That to be in His Presence Who is Love
And Satisfaction was her chief desire,
The one hope of her last weak words, yet I
With human sympathies and human love
Strong in me, please myself with the belief

That His first gift unto His ransomed one
Would be the half soul whose denial here
Had left her life so shorn of human joy.
And even now in rapturous soul converse
They may be glorifying that only now
They meet ; seeing in God's revealing light
How, had they known of love's completeness here,
The things of Heaven perchance had seemed less
sweet,
And this unutterable spirit-bliss
Had never been. But now to endless years
They are together, with their Saviour's smile,
To make the clouds impossible.



LOVE is not all, in this broad world of ours,
Not all, though lives lie waste, though hearts may
break,
And souls have perished, all for Love's sweet sake.
But as in gardens there are other flowers
Than roses, so in life are other powers
Less passionately perfumed that can take
Firm hold on lives left bare of love, and make
The world seem greenly clad through winter hours.
The sober ivy clasps a ruined wall,
It keeps it fair, and shields it from decay ;
And though God's Providence at times deprives
Our hearts of Love, yet round our broken lives
He twines some surer good ; and in this way
He gently teaches us—Love is not all.



BALLANTYNE PRESS: EDINBURGH AND LONDON.

